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Maritime Strategy Or Coalition Defense?

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Robert W. Komer

Haig's account seems fair, although he fudges somewhat on the actions of Americans at Buenos Aires, the United Nations and Washington. It might be noted that the publisher found it necessary to distribute errata sheets on the Falklands chapter, among others.

Mr. Haig's brief authority as "vicar" (he blames the word on Mr. Paul Nitze) was not a happy time and he gives us a disturbing view of how our foreign policy is made. His criticisms of the present administration's preoccupation with domestic affairs and public relations have been well publicized. Great powers cannot act that way for too long without paying a high price. One Washington luminary (the literate one) when reminded of a treaty commitment, replied, with lines from a 17th century play, "That was long ago and in a distant land. Besides, the wench is dead." Mr. Haig saw clearly what this attitude might mean at the end of the day.

It would be easy to dismiss Mr. Haig as tinkling brass (or, given his civilian status, as the clink of his gold wrist bracelet). To do so would not take account of the problem he faced in an administration that didn't like "furriners." But the baggage Mr. Haig brought to his task was equally heavy. Did he understand all that much about his own country? Consider his almost Marxian view of the American roles in the Korean and Vietnam Wars: he professes to believe that if the middle and upper classes of our society had been involved directly on the battlefields, the United States would have followed different strategies or would "have pursued policies that would have preserved the American position without recourse to arms in the first place." This is sheer mindlessness. If Mr. Haig believes that Mr. Harry Truman or his successors embarked on wars in East Asia with a class view, then he has defined starkly for us the limits of an operator. Messrs. Baker, Deaver and Meese indeed may be "essentially public relations men" but good PR men (Mr. Haig described them as "wizards") know their product and its audience. Caveat may well be the word, and thus warned, we should look behind this tale, "neither autobiography nor formal history."

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Komer, Robert W. *Maritime Strategy Or Coalition Defense?* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1984. 116pp. $19

This is a spirited and thought-provoking defense of the Carter administration's "NATO-first" policy (which established the adequacy of US forces for the defense of Western Europe as the *sine qua non* for US military preparedness elsewhere), and a critique of the next Administration's "maritime strategy" that was very much a reaction to the perceived overemphasis of Western European defense at the expense of other areas. Komer, who was Defense Secretary Brown's under secretary for policy, deliberately avoids the historical contrast

between "continental" and "maritime" schools of strategy, and instead stresses the need for closer integration of US and (Western European) allied defenses at the "coalition" level. By this he means greater burden sharing, co-production and standardization of weaponry, and a greater geographical and functional division of intra-coalition defense tasks.

A coalition straregy does not necessarily rule out an emphasis on naval and maritime resources and strategies, of course; indeed, Komer stresses the point that the United States and its allies must maintain powerful naval forces to ensure the credibility of a coalition strategy. Komer's objections center on what he asserts as some of the particular "flaws" of the Reagan administration's maritime emphasis. For one, he believes that the present investment in a 600-ship navy is an unwise diversion of funds from much needed improvements in conventional land and air forces. Twelve aircraft carriers, he claims, are sufficient for the Navy's "proper" role in a coalition war, *sea control*. For another, he holds that talk about horizontal escalation—the expansion of a Soviet-initiated war to areas of Soviet military weakness—is fraught with danger, will, in most cases, be unprofitable, and is unlikely to compel the Soviet aggressors to change their collective mind at the initial point of contact. Frankly, Komer is probably chasing shadows when he castigates the horizontal strategists. Indications are that the concept never progressed beyond exactly that; it is doubtful that it ever carried much conviction with the uniformed Navy, unlike some of the civilian military planners that entered the Department of Defense in 1980. If war does break our with the Soviet Union, the United States should consider and should have the wherewithal to take advantage of Soviet vulnerabilities elsewhere. But the choice of peripheral initiatives should be guided by tactical exigencies and opportunities, not the expectation of deciding the main confrontation in the central theater.

It is also obvious from Komer's argument that the author's real advocacy is a mixed strategy. The coalition portion of this strategy is essentially limited to Western Europe. Closer cooperation with Japan and South Korea is recommended (although the specifics thereof are not nearly made as clear as is the case for Europe), but the defense of the Persian Gulf, the author concedes, will have to be a unilateral US affair. One can quibble whether US support for its Pacific allies, the defense of the Middle East oil region and, of course, the protection of the north Atlantic shipping lanes, requires 12 or 15 aircraft carriers; the unavoidable fact is that some sort of US maritime strategy is needed to underwrite both US unilateralism and coalition warfare.

This is a well-written, thought-provoking book. Komer brings to bear many years of practical experience in the making and implementing of US security policy, and his advice warrants critical evalua-

tion. Komer's real world contrast between coalition defense and his maritime strategy is probably somewhat overstated. But, then, advocates must sometimes make their case larger than life.

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Mayer, Martin. *The Diplomats*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday. 1983. 417pp. $17.95

Martin Mayer has written an entertaining and informative book about the people who make up the diplomatic services of the world in the latter part of the twentieth century. The author, who has previously performed the same function for the denizens of Wall Street and Madison Avenue, as well as for lawyers and bankers, is not only a writer with an easy prose style, but a thorough researcher and an indefatigable interviewer as well. The publisher's claim that Mr. Mayer spent five years traveling to foreign ministries, embassies, consulates and agencies in twenty countries to compile this study is entirely credible. Along the way, the author met and eventually married a young lady who was then serving as a State Department official, a circumstance that can only have enhanced his understanding of how the American brand of diplomacy actually operates.

In *The Diplomats*, Mr. Mayer devotes special attention to the problems of training the young professionals. His coverage of two of the very few diplomatic academies which endeavor to do this for foreigners, as well as their own nationals (Austria and Cameroon), is particularly interesting. There are, of course, many academic institutions in the United States and in Europe which offer a broad education to prospective diplomats, but Mr. Mayer focuses instead on technical training schools, which are designed to assist their students to apply their academic knowledge to dealing with the mechanisms and practices of modern diplomacy. In so doing, he demonstrates a high degree of empathy with the young people involved, particularly those from less developed nations. As a kind of by-product of his worldwide investigation of diplomacy, the author also provides two special case studies, one on the Foreign Agricultural Service of the United States and the other on the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Both are worthy of the attention given them and benefit from the sympathetic approach Mr. Mayer takes to their particular problems. The sections on multilateral diplomacy, as seen at the United Nations and in the Brussels headquarters of the European Community are also well worth reading.

Not surprisingly in a book of over 400 pages, there are a few items of unintentional misinformation as well as information. On organizational matters, these are with one exception all very minor. In that instance, however, Mr. Mayer comments on more than one occasion on what he considers to be the close relationship between Labor Attaches in American Embassies and the Central Intelligence Agency, via the AFL/CIO.